

Back-Row Seating and Student Academic Engagement: An Analysis of Adab and the Implementation of the Second Sila of Pancasila

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of back-row seating, or students' tendency to choose seats at the back of the classroom, is common in lectures. Previous research has linked seating position to comfort, concentration, and academic achievement. Unlike those studies, this study emphasizes etiquette, academic responsibility, and the practice of the values of the second principle of the Indonesian ideology, Pancasila: Just and Civilized Humanity. The study aims to determine students' opinions on back-row seating in terms of etiquette and responsibility, in line with the second principle of Pancasila. A descriptive quantitative method was used, involving 59 UIN Walisongo Semarang students who were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and averages. The results show that sitting in the front improves understanding, focus, and learning responsibility. However, some students choose to sit in the back for comfort. These findings are expected to inform the development of students' character.

ABSTRAK

Kata-kata kunci:

Duduk di baris belakang;

keterlibatan akademik;

tanggung jawab akademik;

adab mahasiswa;

implementasi sila kedua

Pancasila.

Posisi Duduk di Barisan Belakang dan Keterlibatan Akademik Mahasiswa: Analisis terhadap Adab dan Implementasi Sila Kedua Pancasila. Fenomena back row seating atau kecenderungan mahasiswa memilih duduk di bagian belakang kelas merupakan hal umum dalam perkuliahan. Penelitian sebelumnya mengaitkan posisi duduk dengan kenyamanan, konsentrasi belajar, dan capaian akademik. Berbeda dari penelitian tersebut, studi ini menekankan aspek adab, tanggung jawab akademik, serta pengamalan nilai Sila ke-2 Pancasila yaitu Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui opini mahasiswa terhadap fenomena back row seating dalam perspektif adab dan tanggung jawab berdasarkan Sila ke-2 Pancasila. Metode yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif deskriptif dengan melibatkan 59 mahasiswa UIN Walisongo Semarang yang dipilih melalui teknik convenience sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner skala Likert lima tingkat dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif berupa frekuensi, persentase, dan nilai rata-rata. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa posisi duduk di depan dinilai dapat meningkatkan pemahaman, fokus, dan tanggung jawab belajar. Namun sebagian mahasiswa memilih duduk di belakang karena kenyamanan. Temuan ini diharapkan menjadi refleksi penting dalam pembentukan karakter mahasiswa.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions serve as places for the transfer of knowledge and bear a significant moral responsibility for shaping students' character, ethics, and moral values. Interestingly, the interaction dynamics between instructors and students during lectures can be observed through simple physical behaviors, such as seating position in the classroom. On many college campuses, students tend to flock to the back rows rather than the front, a common sight.

Previous researchers have long been interested in studies on seating arrangements and choices. From a psychological and classroom dynamics perspective, ([Lestari et al., 2023](#)) note that students' tendency to choose back-row seating is generally driven by personal comfort, a desire to avoid direct attention or supervision from the instructor, and a desire for greater freedom of movement. In line with this, ([Nur Annisa's, 2021](#)) research shows that seating position significantly impacts students' learning behavior and engagement. Those sitting in the front rows tend to be more active and focused and achieve optimal learning outcomes. From an academic ethics perspective, this seating arrangement is also closely intertwined with the principles of etiquette between students and instructors ([Nuhamara, 2018](#)). Furthermore, ([Ulum et al., 2023](#)) emphasize that true decorum and discipline stem from an inner sense of respect for the academic process, not from coercion or strict supervision.

Nevertheless, most previous literature appears limited to discussions of seating positions in relation to physical comfort, concentration, and academic achievement. This research gap is what this article aims to address and constitutes its scientific novelty. This study attempts to integrate sociological phenomena in the classroom with an understanding of national ideology, specifically the practice of the Second Principle of the Indonesian state philosophy, Pancasila: "Just and Civilized Humanity." This principle mandates that every individual respect others through empathy and moral awareness. Therefore, students clustering in the back rows should not be dismissed as merely a matter of spatial comfort. Rather, it is crucial to analyze this phenomenon as a reflection of students' civility, discipline, and moral responsibility in their respect for their lecturer.

Students' tendency to choose specific seating positions theoretically reflects the depth of their mental investment in the instructional process, particularly the phenomenon of mass accumulation in the back rows. This physical behavior is closely intertwined with the construct of student engagement. According to the taxonomy by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), manifestations of engagement fall under behavioral, cognitive, and emotional categories. ([Rachmad, 2022](#)) reinforces this idea in Educational Engagement Theory, stating that contemporary classrooms are expected to be active arenas of co-creation. When students consciously withdraw to the back of the classroom to minimize interaction or avoid direct attention from the instructor, they are seeking passive comfort, which risks degrading the quality of their cognitive absorption.

In addition to engagement, these spatial dynamics convey implicit messages through the hidden curriculum. As ([Philip W. Jackson, 1968](#)) have noted, the spatial structure of a classroom and its routines exert a powerful formative influence on the internalization of sociological norms and unwritten expectations. Seating choices reflect how students interpret responsibility, discipline, and mental readiness to respect the academic climate. This sociological orientation of the classroom ultimately leads to tangible character formation.

According to ([Thomas Lickona's, 1991](#)) concept of character education, this dimension requires concrete moral actions during lectures. In the context of national education, these actions manifest as a civic disposition that upholds interpersonal ethics, a tangible embodiment of the implementation of the value of “Just and Civilized Humanity,” as mandated by the Second Principle of the Indonesian ideology, Pancasila.

Based on this background and the existing research gap, the research questions in this study are as follows: First, what is the level of civility among students, as reflected by their tendency to sit in the back of the classroom? Second, what level of discipline does this group of students demonstrate? Third, what form does their sense of responsibility take in participating in the overall lecture process?

In light of these issues, this article aims to analyze students' classroom etiquette, assess their level of discipline, and explore the concept of academic responsibility among students who opt for seats in the back of the classroom. Through an analysis of collected questionnaire data, this mini-study will objectively determine whether students' seating choices are driven solely by personal comfort or signal a decline in ethical values and the implementation of the Second Principle of Pancasila in contemporary academic life.

Method

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive approach. It was designed to gauge students' views on back-row seating and academic engagement from an etiquette perspective, as well as the implementation of the Second Principle of Pancasila. Data were collected by distributing an online questionnaire via Google Forms to students across various study programs and academic cohorts at UIN Walisongo Semarang, yielding 59 responses.

Non-probability convenience sampling was used to select respondents based on ease of access and willingness to complete the questionnaire. The five-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed to measure respondents' opinions quantitatively. It included several indicators, such as seating preferences, learning effectiveness, academic responsibility, and perspectives on etiquette in the learning process.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate the frequency distribution and mean value for each statement and identify trends in the responses. This study adhered to the principles of respondent data confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Results and Discussion

Several studies suggest that seating position is linked to students' levels of attention, participation, and academic achievement. Students who sit closer to the instructor tend to be more focused and engaged than those sitting at the back of the classroom. For example, a study by ([Will et al., 2020](#)) found that the farther students are seated from the instructor, the lower their academic performance tends to be. Similar results were reported by ([Yu et al., 2025](#)), who demonstrated that seating location significantly impacts student learning outcomes.

A study by ([Yu et al., 2025](#)) showed that students' seating location is related to their academic performance. Students who sit in certain areas, particularly those closest to the center of learning activities, tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement and better academic achievement than students who sit farther away from the instructor. From an etiquette perspective, as seekers of knowledge, students have a responsibility to demonstrate sincerity,

respect, and active engagement in learning. This requires them to position themselves appropriately so they can acquire knowledge optimally and respect the instructor as a source of knowledge. Therefore, instilling the values of Pancasila in higher education is important in the modern era, marked by rapid social change and technological development. Various studies indicate that education grounded in Pancasila values contributes to character development, civic responsibility, and a positive academic culture among students. Consequently, seating behavior can serve as an indicator of the implementation of these values in campus life (Muhajir et al., 2025). The results of the study “Back Row Seating and Student Academic Engagement: An Analysis of Etiquette and the Implementation of the Second Principle of Pancasila” are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Variables Affecting Students' Seating Preferences

No	Statement	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)	Category
1	Sit in the back rows more often.	2,83	1,19	56,6%	Moderate
2	Sit in the front rows more often.	3,58	0,89	71,5%	High
3	Choose the back rows because they are more comfortable.	2,93	1,08	58,6%	Moderate
4	Feel free to express yourself in the back row.	3,31	1,09	66,1%	Moderate
5	Feel comfortable in the back to avoid being the center of the professor's attention.	3,14	1,11	62,7%	Moderate

Table 2: Variables Related to Learning Effectiveness and Academic Responsibility

No	Statement	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)	Category
1	Pay more attention to the instructor when sitting in the front row.	4,07	0,81	81,4%	Very High
2	Understand the course material better when sitting in the front row.	3,97	0,85	79,3%	High
3	Feel more responsible when sitting in the front row.	3,90	0,90	78,0%	High
4	Remain responsible even when sitting in the back row.	3,97	0,79	79,3%	High

Table 3: Variables Related to the Perspective of Adab and the Internalization of the Second Principle of Pancasila

No	Statement	Mean	SD	Percentage (%)	Category
1	Tend to show more respect for the instructor when sitting in the front row.	3,98	0,86	79,7%	High
2	Continue to maintain a polite and respectful attitude when sitting in the back row.	4,08	0,65	81,7%	Very High
3	Seating position affects classroom etiquette.	3,78	0,83	75,6%	High
4	Sitting orderly and paying attention to the lecturer is a practice of the second principle of Pancasila.	4,25	0,54	85,1%	Very High
5	Respecting the instructor and classmates is civilized behavior.	4,22	0,56	84,4%	Sangat Tinggi
6	Be responsible and respectful regardless of seating position.	4,54	0,57	90,8%	Very High

Percentage by category	
0-20%	Very Low
21-40%	Low
41-60%	Moderate
61-80%	High
81-100%	Very High

The findings suggest that students prefer to sit at the front of the classroom rather than at the back. This suggests that they are aware of the academic benefits of sitting closer to the lecturer. These findings are consistent with those of Lestari et al., who demonstrated that seating position influences students' concentration during learning. Furthermore, Will et al. found that students seated closer to the instructor exhibited higher levels of engagement and achieved better academic results than those seated farther away.

Nevertheless, the findings reveal that some students still prefer to sit in the back rows. This finding is noteworthy because it indicates that seating preferences are influenced not only by academic considerations but also by psychological and social factors. Students who choose to sit at the back generally perceive this position as more comfortable, offering greater freedom of expression and reducing the feeling of being under the lecturer's direct attention. This suggests that students do not always select the seating position considered most effective for learning; rather, they also take into account a learning environment that provides a sense of security and comfort throughout the lecture process.

These findings are consistent with the study by ([Mendrofa et al., 2025](#)), which found that students prefer sitting in the back rows for comfort, out of habit, and to avoid direct interaction with lecturers. Similarly, ([Gao et al., 2022](#)) explained that seating experiences significantly influence students' comfort and engagement in the learning process.

A deeper examination of this phenomenon suggests that the passive comfort underlying students' tendency to withdraw to the back rows operates through the mechanism of the hidden curriculum. As argued by ([Philip W. Jackson, 1968](#)), the spatial organization of classrooms conveys implicit messages and unwritten expectations that students subconsciously absorb. The spatial choice to occupy seats in the back rows reflects how students negotiate their psychological comfort in the presence of instructors. According to ([Fredricks et al., 2004](#)), this dimension is closely associated with emotional engagement, whereby selecting areas distant from the center of instruction often serves as a defensive strategy to reduce social anxiety arising from direct instructor monitoring.

Furthermore, the strong tendency of students to feel more comfortable expressing themselves when seated in the back rows indicates that the classroom functions not only as a setting for academic activities but also as a social space that shapes student behavior. For some students, sitting at the back offers more opportunities to interact freely with their peers while reducing the social pressure that may arise when seated closer to the lecturer. Therefore, a preference for back-row seating should not be interpreted as an indication of low learning motivation to learn; rather, it reflects students' adaptive efforts to create a learning environment that aligns with their psychological needs.

This study demonstrates that students' seating preferences result from the interaction between academic and psychological needs. On the one hand, students recognize that sitting in the front rows can enhance learning effectiveness. On the other hand, the need for comfort, freedom of expression, and reduced social pressure also plays a significant role in determining seating choices. Thus, seating preferences not only reflect students' learning strategies but also illustrate how they adapt to the social environment within the classroom.

Based on the findings of this study, students' seating preferences indicate that a considerable proportion of respondents prefer the front rows to the back rows. The research data suggest that students tend to associate front-row seating with enhanced concentration, improved comprehension of course materials, and greater academic responsibility. This finding is consistent with the study by ([Yu et al., 2025](#)), which reported a significant relationship between seating location and students' academic performance. Students seated closer to the center of instructional activities demonstrated higher levels of engagement than those positioned farther away. Similarly, ([Will et al., 2020](#)) argued that the distance between students and instructors influences students' attention and academic achievement.

The tendency for students seated in the front rows to report higher levels of focus and understanding can be explained theoretically by Educational Engagement Theory, as proposed by ([Rachmad, 2022](#)). Instructional processes in the classroom require dynamic co-creation involving both behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement. Physical proximity to the lecturer and the board can mechanically reduce visual distractions in the classroom. Such conditions optimize students' cognitive absorption capacity and facilitate self-regulated learning. Conversely, the finding that some students maintain a strong commitment to learning

despite being seated in the back rows demonstrates that cognitive engagement is not always linearly associated with physical distance. Rather, it is driven by personal mental investment and individual motivation toward the learning process.

Nevertheless, the respondent data also reveal that academic responsibility remains high even among students who choose to sit in the back rows. This finding is noteworthy because it suggests that learning responsibility is not entirely determined by physical factors such as seating position. From the perspective of character education, responsibility is a moral value that originates from an individual's inner awareness. This view is consistent with the findings of (Ulum et al., 2023), who emphasized that discipline and responsibility in education should ideally emerge from self-awareness rather than being driven solely by external supervision.

This condition is particularly relevant to the context of higher education in Indonesia, which in recent years has emphasized character development through the implementation of Pancasila values and the cultivation of graduate profiles that are not only academically competent but also demonstrate integrity and social responsibility. In higher education settings, students are regarded as adult learners who can independently regulate and manage their own learning processes. Therefore, although seating position may influence the quality of concentration and engagement during classroom activities, academic success ultimately depends on each student's intrinsic motivation and academic self-awareness.

According to (Gumilar et al., 2025), this phenomenon can be understood through the concept of civic engagement. Civic engagement refers to the active participation of citizens in social life, as reflected in participatory attitudes, a sense of responsibility, concern for the surrounding environment, and a commitment to making positive contributions to society. In the context of higher education, civic engagement is expressed not only through extracurricular activities but also through students' active involvement in the learning process. Universities play a strategic role in cultivating students as active, reflective, participatory, and responsible citizens.

The phenomenon of back-row seating can be viewed as a form of student behavior in the academic environment closely related to the level of academic engagement. Seating position is not merely a matter of spatial preference; it can influence the intensity of student–lecturer interactions, attention to learning materials, willingness to participate in discussions, and overall involvement in classroom activities. Students who choose to sit in the front rows tend to demonstrate higher levels of academic engagement because they can interact more easily with lecturers, pay closer attention to instructional explanations, and participate more actively in classroom learning.

However, the findings of this study also indicate that the majority of respondents believe that academic responsibility and respect for lecturers are not determined solely by seating position. This perspective is consistent with the argument of (Gumilar et al., 2025), who contend that civic engagement cannot be fostered merely through rules and regulations. Rather, it must emerge from students' internal awareness and their willingness to participate actively and act responsibly in both educational processes and broader social life.

From this perspective, seating preferences should not be interpreted solely as indicators of students' learning motivation or academic commitment. Instead, they reflect the complex interaction between individual psychological needs, learning strategies, and levels of

engagement within the academic environment. Consequently, the development of civic engagement in higher education requires learning environments that encourage active participation while accommodating students' diverse preferences and needs.

The perspective of adab (ethical conduct) and the internalization of the Second Principle of Pancasila among university students fundamentally depend on value awareness originating within the individual rather than on external factors such as seating position. Although comfort, freedom of expression, and the desire to reduce social pressure may influence students' seating preferences, these factors do not alter their fundamental attitudes toward maintaining courtesy, respect, and academic responsibility during classroom activities. According to Ulum et al. (2023), discipline and responsible behavior in education should ideally emerge from self-awareness rather than from external supervision or positional factors.

Within the framework of Student Engagement Theory, physical proximity to lecturers may facilitate interaction, attention, and concentration; however, it is not a prerequisite for demonstrating ethical behavior and respect. Students can distinguish between their need for learning comfort and their obligation to maintain proper conduct. This finding is particularly relevant to the context of higher education in Indonesia, which emphasizes character development and the implementation of Pancasila values. It suggests that the internalization of the principle of "Just and Civilized Humanity" has become a behavioral foundation for students, enabling them to maintain respectful and responsible conduct regardless of whether they are seated in the front or back rows of the classroom.

These findings hold important implications for character education. Efforts to cultivate values should not be overly focused on rigid or formalistic classroom arrangements. Instead, a more effective approach is to strengthen students' intrinsic motivation and self-awareness. When values are deeply understood and internalized, respectful, disciplined, and responsible behavior emerges naturally without dependence on seating position or direct supervision. This study further confirms that seating position primarily affects learning comfort rather than determining the quality of students' moral character or the extent to which they embody ethical values.

The empirical evidence, which reveals the highest mean score of 4.54 on the dimension of responsibility regardless of seating position, reinforces the conclusion that students' academic morality has reached a level of autonomous maturity. Within [\(Thomas Lickona's, 1991\)](#) framework of character education, this integrity reflects the harmonious integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The spatial boundaries of classroom architecture no longer constrain students' moral character.

Furthermore, this social orientation reflects the strengthening of mature civic dispositions. Referring to the premise proposed by Azimpour and [\(Khalilzade, 2015\)](#), a positive campus culture contributes, albeit indirectly, to the development of civility and responsible public character. The consistent display of orderly and respectful behavior by students, regardless of whether they sit in the front or back rows, represents a concrete manifestation of the interpersonal ethics embodied in the value of "Just and Civilized Humanity" as articulated in the Second Principle of Pancasila.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the phenomenon of back-row seating among university students is influenced by several factors, particularly comfort, freedom of expression, and the desire to reduce direct attention from lecturers. Although some students continue to prefer sitting in the back rows, the results indicate that the majority of respondents tend to choose front-row seats more frequently during lectures.

Seating position was also found to influence learning effectiveness. Students who sit in the front rows tend to pay closer attention to lecturers, comprehend course materials more easily, and feel a greater sense of responsibility toward the learning process. Nevertheless, academic responsibility is not entirely determined by seating position, as students seated in the back rows also demonstrate a relatively high level of responsibility.

From the perspective of adab (ethical conduct) and the implementation of the Second Principle of Pancasila, the majority of students exhibit a strong awareness of the importance of respecting lecturers, maintaining courteous behavior, and fulfilling their academic responsibilities regardless of where they are seated. Therefore, the phenomenon of back-row seating should not be viewed merely as a matter of seating preference. Rather, it is closely related to how students manage their learning focus, academic responsibility, and the practice of ethical values as well as the principle of “Just and Civilized Humanity” within the university learning environment.

Based on the findings of this study, students' seating preferences are influenced by various factors, particularly comfort, freedom of expression, and the desire to reduce direct attention from lecturers, although the majority of students tend to prefer sitting in the front rows of the classroom. Seating position was found to affect learning effectiveness, as students seated in the front rows generally demonstrate greater concentration, a better understanding of course materials, and a stronger sense of responsibility toward their academic activities.

Nevertheless, academic responsibility and ethical conduct (adab) are not entirely determined by seating position. Students who choose to sit in the back rows also exhibit a considerable level of responsibility and maintain a strong awareness of the importance of respecting lecturers, demonstrating courteous behavior, and embodying the values of the Second Principle of Pancasila regardless of where they are seated. Therefore, this phenomenon should not be understood merely as a matter of seating preference; rather, it reflects how students manage their learning focus, academic responsibility, and the implementation of the values of just and civilized humanity within the university learning environment.

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